

A VISIT TO SWITZERLAND IN WINTER.

I wonder how many people have made their first acquaintance with Switzerland in winter. This was my good fortune a few weeks ago, and how much I enjoyed every bit of it! We left England on Friday, February 2nd, by the 10 a.m. from Victoria, crossing by way of Folkestone and Boulogne. We reached Paris about 7-0 that same evening, and left it again about 9-0. After a night in the train we reached Aigle (our railway terminus) about 11 a.m. on Saturday morning; and there we got into a carriage to begin our drive of seven miles uphill to Villars. So far we had seen very little snow, but we soon got into it as we wound up and up the steep roads. How steep it was you will guess by the fact that it took us from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. to cover the seven miles, with a short halt on the way to allow us to change into sledges, when the snow got too deep for wheels. We appeared to be within half a mile of Villars quite two hours before we reached it. On the way up I had my first sight of a vineyard, and the thing which struck me most about it was the nearness of the vines to each other, so that there appeared to be no room for leaves and fruit to spread themselves out to the sun in the summer.

It was too misty for us to see anything of the mountains beyond our immediate neighbourhood, but at one place the bank rose up so steeply on one side of the road that my neck ached with the mere effort to look up it, and even then I could see nothing of the top, and on the other side of us was a bottomless gulf of mist.

At last we reached our destination, Villars, which consists of five hotels overlooking a tiny village, the resort of many French people during the summer months. Our hotel, Le Grand Muveran, took its name from the mountain on whose side it stands, and to our left was Le Petit Muveran, while in front the ground sloped rapidly away for miles into the

valley of the Rhone; and across it we looked on to a vast panorama of mountains, the grandest and boldest among them being the Dent du Midi, which appeared to be within a walk of us, but in reality was quite fifteen or twenty miles away. Everywhere lay the snow—beautiful, crisp, delicious snow—the only change from its sparkling whiteness being the beautiful green of the pine and fir trees, or the dark verandas of the chalets dotted about.

Of course, with so much snow about and only the tracks from village to village, walking was almost impossible; but it was not for that purpose we had come there at that time of year. Our object in coming to Villars in winter was to enjoy the delights of tobogganing and ski-ing, for which the hills round it are admirably suited. As this was the first winter during which any of the hotels at Villars have been open to visitors, and it was more or less of an experiment, the skating was not all one could wish, but that is to be much improved before next winter; but for the other two winter sports a better spot could scarcely be found. There are hills easy and hills difficult for ski-ing; and on a toboggan one can go for a run of six or seven miles with scarcely a stop at all, if one does not object to the long pull up again!

Of the three sports, there is absolutely no doubt that ski-ing is by far and away the best, both for enjoyment and for exercise. It makes one feel so absolutely free, for as long as there is any snow to go upon, you can roam where you will, up hill and down dale, and you never know quite what is going to happen next, so that it never becomes monotonous. For the benefit of those who have never seen a pair of ski-es, may I just explain what ski-ing is? It is really a form of tobogganning, only not on a prepared track; and for the purpose you have a piece of board, the same width as your foot and about four feet in length, attached by means of straps to each foot, and on these you slide down hill, the art being to keep upright meanwhile, and to steer yourself in the direction you *intend* to travel. Most of us felt we had made a distinct advance in the art when we had our first fall *forwards*, for usually you sit down ignominiously in the snow, and are dragged on, whether you will or not, by your ski-es. And then, oh the difficulty of getting up again! for it is almost impossible for anyone else to help you,

and you feel sometimes as though you never *will* stand upright again; and I have known even an experienced person take twenty minutes over it! But for all its difficulties, it is a grand sport, and a fall in the snow can hardly hurt anybody.

We were very fortunate in the people we met, and in the weather while at Villars, for we were only kept in-doors for two days by freshly falling snow and mist, which made all sports impossible; and we hardly knew the meaning of the word "cold," Villars being so sheltered from all cold winds by its surrounding hills, so that out-door wraps were hardly needed all the time. Before we left the snow was disappearing fast, and great patches of brown earth were beginning to show on all sides, which we much regretted to see. When we left we had a most alarming drive down to Aigle, for we had to go all the way on wheels (not sledges), and as there was still a great deal of snow and ice about on the banks and roads, the consequence was that the back of our waggonette every few minutes kept trying to slide round in front of the horses, who, to keep at all in front had to go down hill at almost a gallop; while on one side of us there was scarcely anything to prevent the wheel from slipping over the edge off the road, when we should have been rolled down hill for miles! And we had about six miles of this! And to add to our agony, at one place the driver stopped the horses within a foot of the road's edge to hand *string* across to the driver of our luggage cart *to tie on a loose wheel* with! I need scarcely mention how thankful we all were to find ourselves once more on level ground, nor yet how sorry we were to say good-bye to dear Villars and Switzerland.

S. M. C.

PAPER CHASE AS AN AID TO SCOUTING.

Perhaps it may be useful to students who are using B.P.'s notes on scouting for Class II., to hear that we found it a great help in the scouting to keep a Paper Chase in view. We fixed the date for the 24th February, and before that time many of our walks—and we had two a day—were taken up with getting to know the country round: the chief roads, lanes and paths, and their directions, the ponds and ditches and ploughed and grass fields; then tracking was taken in hand, the wetter and muddier the day the better the attempt. Cart horses, carriage horses and ponies we tracked for some distance, but this is rather difficult along frequented roads, as the footmarks get so over ridden. Hob-nailed boots were very encouraging; and one day two of the party found a loose stag, and were able to track him quite a long way by his hoof marks. Nearly every day we practised running for some distance, increasing time and speed every two or three days. This helped to decide the hares, and they proved very successful, as we (hounds) did not catch sight of them till they were well on their way home. The afternoon of the chase we all met (two hares and five hounds) at a quarter to three, six minutes' start allowed, and by that time we found the hares well out of sight and sound. Two tracks were laid at the start, one over a stile and round by a pond into some fields, N.E., the other through a farmyard and over a stile which led into a wood, due east. Two hounds went each way, and soon those on the second track called out their success and the rest rejoined them; but after following another one hundred yards found ourselves at a standstill. It was a false trail after all, and we had to retrace our steps (a rule made before starting that the trail must be followed and false tracks retraced; no short cuts to be made unless at quite close quarters), and start afresh on the right one, the

hares by this time having had a splendid start. We soon made up for lost time, and ran through spinnies and copses, across ploughed land and grass fields, over stiles and fences, taking no notice of scratched hands and legs and a few thorns. After thirty-five minutes more or less continual running we caught sight of the hares on their way home; but succeeded in following another false trail before we finally arrived, panting and breathless, a few minutes after the hares, but none the worse for the run. All the children thoroughly enjoyed it, and I do not think there have been any ill effects. The boots were very wet and dirty, and skirts muddy too, but all were prepared for it, and of course all changed as soon as it was over. Altogether it only took just over an hour.



NATURE NOTES.

"March, the roaring moon of the daffodil and the crocus," certainly did not come in like a lion this year, and in consequence all the flowers are much earlier than last year. A plant of Barren Strawberry flowered on the road to Skelwith at the end of January; Celandine, Coltsfoot, Alder and Staminate Yew were all found out in the third week of February. Some Sycamore buds are nearly bursting on the Rydal Road, and rose leaves and honeysuckle are fully out. The name Celandine is derived from the Greek "Chelidon," a swallow, because its juice was supposed to have been applied by the old swallows to the young ones who were blind to restore their sight. Two tulip trees were discovered near the landing stage at Waterhead. The buds are purple and somewhat flattened. If they are opened, a tiny leaf with a very long petiole can be seen inside, folded down its margins. A pair of almond-shaped stipules at the leaf-base encloses another tiny leaf. The curious shape of the leaf is caused by the early development of the petiole and also by the pressure of the stipules on the margin of the leaf. These trees do not flower generally so far north, but in the south they are much commoner. The Balsam Poplar buds look very beautiful under the microscope. The future leaves are orange coloured and arranged in a number of rings, which are very succulent looking. The buds are protected from cold by a resinous substance, and have a very pleasant smell. Horse Chestnut buds are smeared with both gum and resin, and there are two kinds, the leaf buds and flower and leaf buds. Under the microscope a most wonderful arrangement can be noticed. Tiny flattened flower spikes are pressed out in a very small space and surrounded by the tiny leaflets.

Horse chestnut is one of the few trees which has a terminal bud that does not wither; and, curiously enough, in such trees as lime and elm, where there are a good many more leaves, the tree terminal bud always fails.

All the amentiferous trees are in flower at the beginning of March, when the strong winds carry the pollen grains from one tree to another. Each pollen grain is specially made so that it will be easily blown away. None of the wind pollenised flowers therefore need to have such attractive colours, and so we find among their ranks, the nettle, dogs' mercury, adoxa, and all the catkin bearing trees.

The rooks are just beginning to be very busy in the bare trees. One solitary nest has been built in a tree in the lane by an independent pair of birds who watch there alternately, as the others are trying to destroy it. Some of them were seen carrying the twigs away from it to the rookery. Rooks very seldom allow a nest to be built out of the rookery, unless they wish to enlarge it. The rooks are very destructive and pull twigs off the trees in the garden.

The Goldeneye, a little duck which breeds in Iceland, has been seen diving in Rydal Lake. He is more often seen in Loughrigg Tarn.

Four ravens were seen near Thirlmere on February 27th, and some more a little later near Nabscarr Terrace. There seem to be a great number of Long-Tailed Tits this year, for as many as eight flocks have been seen by different persons. Bullfinches favour the sunny corner of a garden in Brathay where four have been seen together.

The first lambs were seen playing in a field near Keswick on February 27th; caddis-worms were seen under the footbridge in the church fields on February 25th. Two very grey squirrels have been noticed: one on the Rydal Road and the other under Loughrigg. A few bees were flying on the flower-beds in some very springlike days in February, but they have not been seen since the snow fell. Two caterpillars of the Yellow Underwing were found lying on the top of the snow in different fields. One of them also disappeared as mysteriously as it came, for when it was put safely in a matchbox, it jumped during the night on the floor,

where it was found uninjured the next morning, but it vanished entirely during the following night and was never seen again.

FLOWER LIST.

Date.	Flower.
January 15th.	Groundsel.
"	Staminate and Pistillate Hazel.
"	Herb Robert.
"	Gorse.
"	Chickweed.
"	Daisy.
"	Dandelion.
January 18th.	Ox-Eye Daisy.
" 28th.	Primrose.
February 1st.	Staminate Dog Mercury.
" 1st.	Barren Strawberry.
" 13th.	Staminate Wych Elm.
" 12th.	Red Dead Nettle.
" 15th.	Staminate Willow.
" 1st.	Pink Campion.
" 1st.	Snowdrop.
January 15th.	Shepherd's Purse.
" 28th.	Opposite Leaved Saxifrage.
February 14th.	Petty Spurge.
" 16th.	Staminate Yew.
" 21st.	Colt's Foot.
"	Lesser Celandine.
"	Staminate Alder.
" 27th.	Bitter Hairy Cress.
March 7th.	Staminate Larch.
" 8th.	Pistillate Dog-Mercury.
"	Black Poplar.
"	Toothwort.
"	Golden Saxifrage.
" 13th.	Pistillate Yew.

BIRDS.

January 14th.

1. Chaffinch.
2. House Sparrow.
3. Blue-Tit.
4. Great-Tit.
5. Cole-Tit.
6. Missel-Thrush.
7. Hedge-Sparrow.
8. Jackdaw.
9. Blackbird.
10. Robin.
11. Starling.
12. Rook.
13. Wren.

January 15th.

14. Fieldfare.
15. Dipper.

January 16th.

16. Pheasant.
17. Moor-Fowl.
18. Coot.
19. Dab-chick.
20. Jay.

January 23rd.

21. Magpie.

January 25th.

22. Carrion Crow.
23. Tree-Creeper.
24. Black-headed Gull.
25. Black-backed Gull.

January 30th.

26. Golden-Crested Wren

January 31st.

27. Long-Tailed Tit.

February 4th.

28. Redwing.
29. Wood-Pigeon.

February 9th.

30. Golden-eye.

February 12th.

31. Raven.
32. Herring-Gull.

February 16th.

33. Bullfinch.

February 17th.

34. Pied Wagtail.

February 25th.

35. Grey Wagtail.

February 26th.

36. Peewit.

February 21st.

37. Yellow Hammer.
38. Meadow Pippit.
39. Song Thrush.

March 4th.

40. Wood Owl.

March 5th.

41. Curlew.

DERBYSHIRE NOTES.

March is doing its best to be January, April and itself rolled into one. High winds, snow, rain and warm sunshine take turn and turn about to enchant or harry us. Flower lists are small, and birds hide themselves. But there is always Pilkington.

I wonder if any of you know Pilkington's Derbyshire. I have just made his acquaintance, and we hope to be great friends in course of time. He takes a friendly interest in birds, beasts and flowers, and gives quaint details of all. He gives, as he says, "a compleat list of all the plants that grow spontaneously in the county, as well as those that are useful." He also provides a "list" of the wild birds of his date (1779). This is what he says, for example, of *Butterwort* or Yorkshire Sanicle.

"It is said that new milk, poured upon the fresh leaves in a strainer and set by a day or two, becomes stiff and tenacious, that it does not yield any whey and soon is converted into a very pleasant and wholesome food."

Of Water Horehound, *Sycopus europæus*.

It dyes black. The juice gives a permanent colour to linen, wool and silk. Travelling gipsies stain their faces with it.

Cotton Grass.

Poor people sometimes stuff their pillows with the down and make candle wicks with it.

Quaking Grass.

Cows, sheep and goats eat it.

If a seed be carefully dissected in a microscope with a fine lancet, the young plant will be found with its leaves and roots perfectly formed. (Does he mean viviparous grass?)

Festuca fluitans. Flote Grass.

Wet ponds and ditches.

The seeds are small but very sweet and nourishing. They are collected in several parts of Poland and Germany under the name of manna seeds, and are esteemed a delicacy in soups and gruel upon account of their nutritious quality and grateful flavour. (I like "grateful flavour." Please it is "my quote!")